

The After-Fate of the Kingdom
441

ing energy, a mind like a treasure-house of intellect and fancy, an imagination glowing with the majesty and antiquity of his office, with the pride of Empire and the prestige of two great dynasties, Norman and Swabian, behind him, could have ruled successfully and at once Southern Italy with its tradition of central monarchy, Northern Italy with its free communes, and Germany with its independent princes, he might have achieved the task. But it was too great even for him. and the devoted servants that he had. Better for him indeed had he never attained to the perilous inheritance of the Empire, better when once Emperor if he had never sworn, as at Strasburg in 1216, to give Sicily to his son; for the Papacy, an invincible antagonist, redeeming its initial mistake in allowing Empire and Sicily to be united, was bent on separating the two. His determination to keep Europe in a single, and that a powerful, hand from Rugen to Taranto, his proud resolution never to stoop one inch to the Holy See, his long attempts to crush the Lombard City-Leagues—the vain hope of his grandfather—led him into a war with the greatest office in the West save his own, and

ruined
both himself and his dynasty. As with
Napo-
leon, this great genius might have
produced more
lasting results had it operated upon a
narrower
field. His energies undissipated, his
attention cir-
cumscribed, Southern Italy might
never have lost
what was in effect a native dynasty, a
true heir to